Fact sheet – Integrating content and language: Meeting the needs of learner drivers

AMEP RESEARCH CENTRE

miscellaneous 2

The issues

The Parks Community Centre in Adelaide identified social isolation as the key factor disadvantaging Arabic women in the local community in 2001. Poor public transport facilities prohibited these women from participating in English as a second language (ESL) and community classes, as well as a range of health services and other programs. Moreover, these women wanted to pick up their children from school, take them to sport on Saturday morning or to a playgroup during the week; but this was not feasible without a car, because the distances were too great to be covered by foot, while using public transport would take too long. For these women, getting a driver's licence and a car would alleviate these problems.

History of the project

Home Tutor Scheme bilingual class at West Childcare Centre, Adelaide

In 2001, three of the Sudanese women in the AMEP Literacy Project class at West Childcare Centre asked the Home Tutor organiser if they could get help with their Learner's Licence. In response, the Home Tutor Scheme set up a class for eight women from Arabic-speaking backgrounds. Materials and methodology were developed by Prue Hemming, an experienced ESL teacher with Adelaide Institute of TAFE's English Language Services (ELS). A Home Tutor with an Arabic-speaking background taught the class two hours a week for ten weeks in both Arabic and English. Five of the eight women went on to get their Learner's Licence. However, the Sudanese women in the group did not progress successfully and did not sit for the test.

ELS class for Sudanese, Eritrean and Iraqi women with low-level literacy

During the following term, Sudanese women in a low-level literacy class were taught the Give Way part of the driving rules once a week for two hours. The class did not progress to reading the Give Way diagrams on paper, as the women needed to physically locate themselves in the space by using their bodies to 'be the driver in the car'. To achieve this, the simulated road intersection was taped onto the carpet, and each week the women became 'cars', according to the colour of their dress. They used paper plates and frisbees for steering wheels. They began to direct each other, to argue, and to support each other. One day, one of the women suddenly understood the concept and demonstrated her understanding to the group. When she had finished, she stood smiling with her frisbee steering wheel in both hands and said, 'Be like a man!'. At the end of the term, the students were still not at the stage where they could read the diagrams, and the class stopped.

ELS bilingual class for Arabic-speaking-background women at the Parks Community Centre, 2001–2002

At the end of 2001, the Parks Community Centre asked ELS to support the Driving Rules Project, which had been set up by a student social worker who had identified that Arabic-speaking-background women in the local area needed to get their driver's licence in order to access the services and classes run at the centre. The volunteer instructor had dropped out, and ELS was asked to take over the class. The community centre paid for an Arabic interpreter. Again, Prue Hemming taught four disparate-level groups during 2001 and 2002, with an interpreter present. Over this period, 38 women got their Learner's Licence. The test was conducted in

the group setting in the presence of a different interpreter. The pass rate was 100%.

When the fourth group of women passed the test, Prue asked them what they were going to do when they had got their driving licence. The group leader replied in English: 'We are going to take off our veils, put on our bikinis, get in the car, drive to the beach, and have a party!'.

ELS city-based class, Term 2, 2003

Following the success with the ELS bilingual class, a research project was set up jointly between the AMEP Research Centre and the teachers at ELS. The aim of the project was to investigate a content-based syllabus that provided both language and content instruction to learners planning to take the learner driver test. The 58 students who participated were taught by a team of two experienced ESL teachers, Prue Hemming and Tamara Sydorenko.

The Learner's Licence test

The Learner's Licence test consists of two parts:

- the **Give Way test**, in which the learner analyses 12 Give Way diagrams and circles the vehicle that must give way – the learner must get every question correct in order to sit for the Theory test; and
- the **Theory test**, in which the learner completes 40 multiple-choice questions and must get no more than 12 wrong to pass the test – the learner can have an interpreter for this part of the test.

In addition, learners must complete a two-page form, which includes ID details and questions relating to health and organ donation. To get a provisional licence, learners must eventually sit the practical driving test.

Real world involvement – Transport SA

The involvement and cooperation of the Adelaide branch of Transport SA was an integral part of the course and was vital for learner success. Transport SA made a commitment to ELS to conduct the Give Way and Theory tests at ELS, and they were prepared to administer the test in a group, provided there were more than four learners sitting for the test. Learners indicated that they wanted to sit for the test together and in familiar surroundings. This gave them support, but it also potentially opened them up to shame if they failed. Knowing that they were all going through a test ordeal together assisted the bonding process. For those students who sat for the test independently, the assessors emailed the students' results to ELS. The assessors became very involved and excited by the project.

The students

The 58 students involved in the project came from 29 different countries, with the biggest contingent coming from the Sudan. Nearly 80 per cent were female. Their Certificate in Spoken and Written English (CSWE) level ranged from Level 1 to Level 3. It was not possible to use bilingual grouping because of the spread of language groups. However, the basis for success resides in fostering student ownership and cooperative behaviour. This was more likely to happen if students were grouped according to first language rather than language level. Thus, the following groups were formed:

- Eritrean, Sudanese, Iraqi (CSWE I-III);
- South Korean (CSWE I-III);
- Vietnamese, Thai, Filipino, Turkestan (CSWE I–III);
- European (all CSWE III level);
- Chinese (CSWE I-III).

These groups worked together using English and the first language where this was common. Where there was only one speaker from a certain language background in the group (for example, Vietnamese, Thai), the students were highly cooperative in using English to explain and debate with each other.

The teaching program

Goals

The course goal was dictated by the nature of the real-life event – the Learner's Licence test. The learners' goal was to pass the test. To do this, the learner had to:

- develop and use learning strategies to understand the *Driving rules* content;
- use effective problem-solving skills to correctly interpret the situation inherent in the multiple-choice questions, as well as in the range of answers;
- use L1 and L2 verbal and non-verbal strategies in order to interpret the Give Way diagrams;
- write a formatted text (CSWE III level);
- read road and warning signs;
- collate and present ID documents as required by Transport SA;
- follow spoken test instructions in English;
- budget for the $21 test payment.

Content

The *Driving rules* content is extensive and tightly prescribed. The teacher in charge developed a list of content topics and associated language functions (see Table 1). Breaking up the content into manageable

Table 1:   Content topics and associated language functions

Can give way in the following situations:		
Rule	**Language function/structures**	**Checked/Date**
Give way to the right rule	Which car <u>must</u> give way? Why does car X <u>have to</u> give way? • 'Which' question forms • Giving reasons using present tense • Giving reasons using 'if'	

Pedestrian and children's crossing	Vocabulary:
	    wombat
	    koala crossing	

Can follow procedures in an emergency	• Giving instructions • Following instructions • Recording and classifying new vocabulary items	
Can follow regulatory signs	This means that you <u>have to/must</u> This means that you <u>can't/mustn't</u>	

Tailgating	Vocabulary:
	    maximum
	    minimum
	    distance	

parts made it easier for learners to master the huge amount of difficult material. It also facilitated the design of worksheets that presented the topic and key vocabulary in a simple way.

Resources

The teaching props employed were placed in a box on each group table. Each box contained:

• matchbox cars
• large sheets of paper marked with the different types of intersections
• small road signs to use on the intersection sheets
• small Give Way cards
• small Road Warning Sign cards
• cards with theory questions on one side and answers on the other side – the questions related to the road rules of the particular lesson.

In order to provide some practice in test taking for the students, the teachers utilised the Give Way and Theory practice tests on the RAA website, as well as 60 practice questions and answers that were compiled in a Question Booklet, which was distributed to learners in week 8 of the course. This was necessary, as the four different versions of the learner driver test are only known to Transport SA.

The learners used the following resources:

• *Transport SA road rules* book (students bought their own book – $4)
• Royal Automobile Association (RAA) road rules website
• ELS Theory Questions Workbook with answer key (issued in week 8).

The learners made their own workbook using the theory worksheets. They also made notes, drew diagrams, recorded vocabulary and drew pictures to explain points to each other.

Teaching strategies

Each lesson consisted of two parts:

• Give Way rule
• Theory: driving rule/s.

Part 1: The Give Way rule sequence

At the beginning of each lesson, a specific Give Way rule was demonstrated to the whole class, using the intersection sheet with matchbox cars on the floor. The learners then went into their language groups in order to demonstrate the rule to each other. Every week, a set of Give Way cards (see Figure 1) relating to the specific situation (for example, giving way at an intersection without road signs, lights or markings)
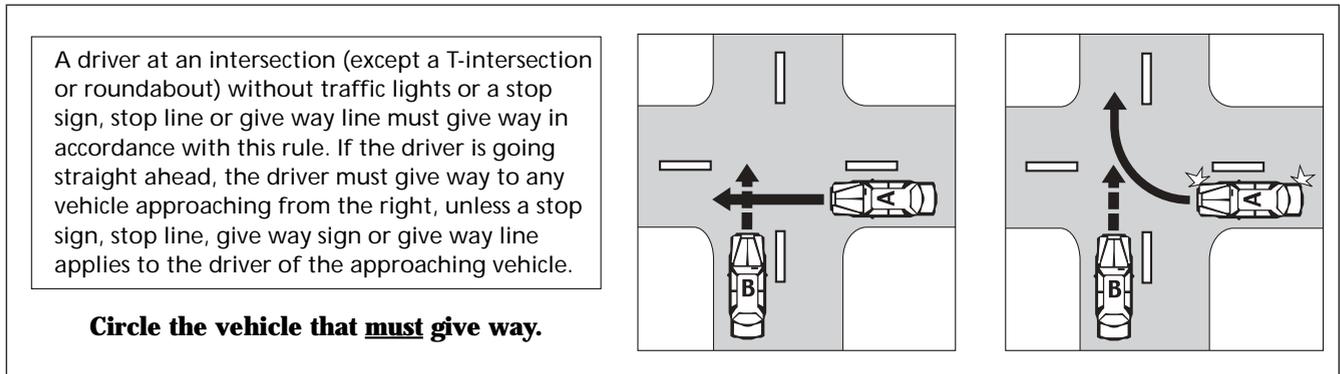
A driver at an intersection (except a T-intersection or roundabout) without traffic lights or a stop sign, stop line or give way line must give way in accordance with this rule. If the driver is going straight ahead, the driver must give way to any vehicle approaching from the right, unless a stop sign, stop line, give way sign or give way line applies to the driver of the approaching vehicle.

Circle the vehicle that <u>must</u> give way.
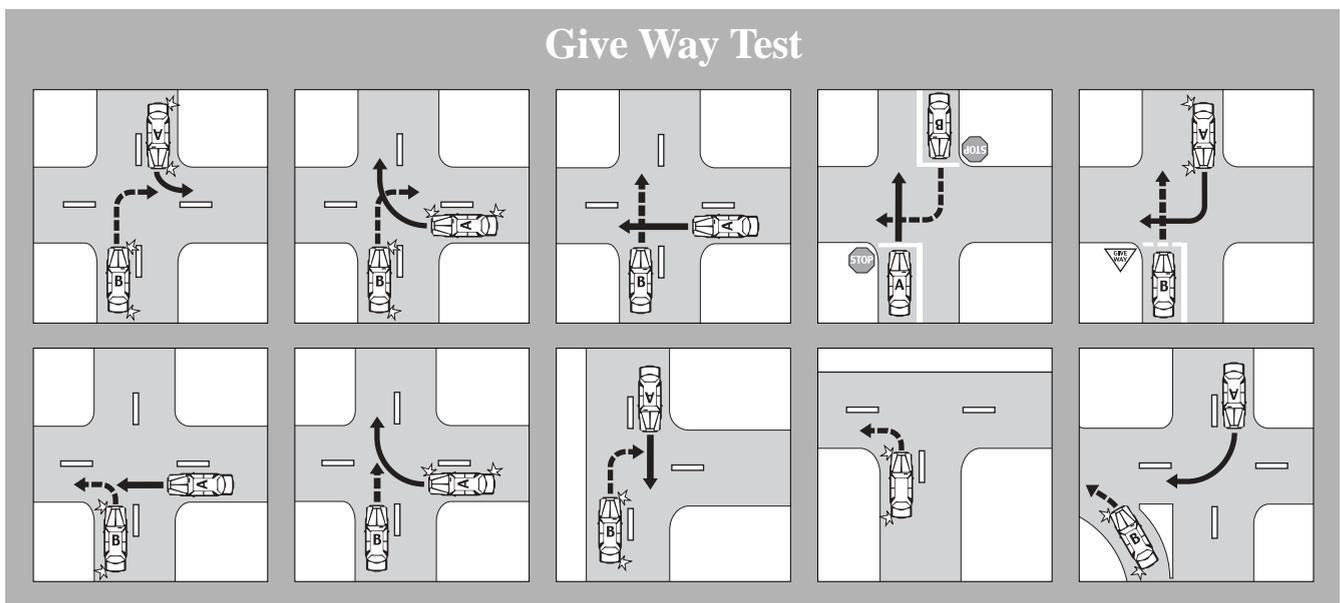

Figure 1:   Give way card

Figure 2:   Give way test

were learned and put into the question and answer box. Each learner was asked to take a different Give Way card and to demonstrate the diagram on the card using the matchbox cars or other props. The correct answer could be found on the back of the card. After this, the learners took a test (see Figure 2). This was followed by feedback.

Part 2: The Theory: Driving rules sequence

The learners stayed in their language groups while the teachers presented the driving rule, using a worksheet or the whiteboard for key vocabulary (see Figure 3). The learners took notes in their workbook and the teachers invited questions. After this, the learners worked in their groups and practised with different multiple-choice questions on the topic. They read the question aloud and chose an answer, which they were able to check on the back of the card. As the content increased, students were required to complete question sheets under test conditions (see Figure 4). The answers were checked with the groups, and the learners discussed the

rules together. Recycled sets of questions were kept in the box so that students could practise before the class commenced officially.

The teacher's role

In ESL content-based learning, teachers monitor their role in guiding learner growth from teacher dependence to interdependence (see, for example, Williams 2004). In taking on this role, the teacher abandons control over the range of language to be learnt, and instead focuses on the demands that the content itself makes of the learner. To do this, the teacher provides the 'container' by overseeing the learning dynamic through which the learners master the demands of the specific content. The teacher remains grounded in this process by implementing learning strategies that will enhance or bring out the learners' responses to the learning.

What happens? The learners automatically become anxious, excited, argumentative, reflective and expressive, as necessitated by their own preferred

What does the sign on the bus window mean?

You must give way to <u>any bus showing this sign</u> IF the bus is indicating <u>to pull out from the kerb</u>.

Q: What will happen on a <u>multi-lane</u> road?

A: On a multi-lane road, this only applies to the left lane.

Give Way to Buses

Figure 3:   Driving rules worksheet

Theory Questions

When must you dip your headlights while driving at night?

A. **Within 200 metres when approaching another vehicle from either the opposite direction or from behind.**

B. **Only when another vehicle is approaching you from the opposite direction and is within 500 metres.**

C. **Within 500 metres when approaching another vehicle from either the opposite direction or from behind.**

D. **Only when another vehicle is approaching you from the opposite direction and is within 200 metres.**

What is the meaning of this sign?

ONE WAY ←

A. **Left turn at any time with care.**

B. **No right turn.**

C. **Traffic must travel along the road only in the direction of the arrow.**

What is the meaning of this sign on a road marked with lanes?

KEEP LEFT UNLESS OVERTAKING

A. **You must only overtake using the right lane.**

B. **You must keep left of the dividing line unless you are overtaking.**

C. **You must not use the right lane unless you are overtaking, signalling to turn or the traffic is congested.**

Figure 4:   Driving rules question sheets

learning styles. This is the profoundly exciting aspect of content-based learning, since the particular requirements of the content will create the language learning steps that the learner must take. During this project, this often elicited strong feelings in the learners, and the teacher's role was to work with the emotional reactions that real learning aroused. In this, the teacher was compassionate, but no more so than the learners.

Initially, the learner will feel overwhelmed by the explosion of vocabulary. This will trigger anxiety, which can be converted to excitement. These feelings are the same in body reaction. The trick is to provide the learners with support so that they can switch their thinking from negative to positive. The vital role of the teacher in this early stage is to remain centred and to suggest strategies in order to give the learner some control over the situation. In the learner driver research group, the lesson sequence itself was structured to contain and channel these feelings and behaviours.

Course outcomes

Reflections on the teacher's role

As noted earlier, in ESL content-based learning, teachers monitor their role in guiding learner growth from teacher dependence to interdependence. During this course, this was evidenced over a relatively short time frame. The learners all grasped the essential concept underlying the Give Way rule at different rates. As the course progressed, the learners supported each other and worked collaboratively with the teachers to structure the lessons. In the learner driver setting, not only did the goal to pass the test engender high levels of motivation, but the strategies and the methodology used created an active learning environment.

One of the learner drivers in the research group said, 'When I come to this class, I am very exhausted after a four-hour class; but when I come here, I get very alive'.

'The teacher as learner and interpreter of content'

The role of the teacher was first of all to understand the road rules and to anticipate the conceptual and language barriers for the students in their learning. As the course progressed and considerable rapport, trust and understanding was built between students and teachers, students started to challenge the teachers by pointing out, for example: 'This question – you said this and that, but it is this and that' or 'The RAA says this, but you, the teacher, said that, and I think it's this'. This helped the teachers to become comfortable with the idea that, as teachers, they were sharing in the learners' growth as their mastery of the subject increased. As the learners' autonomy increased, the role of the teacher as authority on the subject decreased.

The growth towards teacher-learner independence was demonstrated in one of the earlier courses with a group of Arabic-speaking-background women. Towards the end of the course, the women told the teacher how they would have preferred to learn. 'We see you have worked hard for us, but we have a better way.' (Each week, the teacher had carefully designed topic worksheets using gap, cloze and matching tasks). 'Every week we want to practise the test and do the questions, and we find the answer with you and you check'. The teacher implemented their instructions the following week, as well as with successive groups. The method worked. The women developed their own language learning strategies. A lot of the teaching resources had been too contrived and were blocking students from the real content interrogation by using up too much session time.

Learner behaviour and outcomes

'The learner as interrogator and teacher'

The learner characteristics and roles observed during the lessons included:

- Self-motivation and collaboration with others to achieve their goal.
- The learners were at times excited, nervous, serious, and uncertain. They were listening and questioning.
- The learners were intensely involved in the lesson, but at the same time laughing, indicating their satisfaction with what they were doing.
- Sometimes the learners got it right; at other times they made mistakes.
- However, above all, the learners were in charge of their own learning, which grew from high dependence to interdependence.

These characteristics mirror the characteristics of the content teachers. An additional teacher characteristic also became evident – the teacher's continuing role in the process. This is the 'enlightened' aspect of the teacher's role in overseeing the learning process that evolves rapidly in the content learning context.

Learner strategies

The learners adopted a range of self- and group-initiated strategies as they responded to the demands of the content, as well as prepared themselves psychologically to sit for the test. In each of the language groups, leaders at CSWE III level emerged and provided a guiding supportive role.

The learner strategies included:

- Asking the teacher:
  - for additional practice tests and to highlight the important parts of the text in the *Transport SA Driving rules* book (CSWE I and II special focus students);
  - to explain the meaning of conditional tenses when they got answers wrong;
  - for a book of theory questions to use at home and in the holiday break;
  - to put on a holiday class before the test, which was conducted in Week 1 of the next term.
- Saying key words aloud to check for pronunciation whenever they met the teacher in the lift on the way to class.
- Using the RAA website practice test in their own time.
- Checking the teacher's answers by going to the RAA website, as well as checking with each other and asking the teacher for clarification.
- Collecting, recording and collating information in their workbook.
- Checking and recording key vocabulary in language groups.
- Checking vocabulary with their class teachers.
- Coming to class early and doing theory questions in the activity boxes.
- Arguing with and explaining to each other in their language groups.
- Identifying group leaders who could be trusted to help with difficult vocabulary, concepts or general understanding.
- Studying in small groups in coffee and lunch breaks between regular language classes.
- Ringing each other up at night to discuss the theory questions.
- Asking family and friends who had passed the test for help.

- Getting community members to translate some text in the *Road rules* book.
- Inviting the Sudanese bilingual worker to attend the class in order to interpret for some sessions.

Language learning

If the *Driving rules* content drives the learning, then how do the learners cope with English language syntax, lexicon and genre? The answer key lies in the inherent challenge and the degree of engagement that the learner has with the content. In the case of the learner driver, the goal to pass the test in order to learn to drive, so as to get a job, go shopping, take children to sport, visit friends, go to the beach, have a life outside of four walls – to be like everyone else whizzing around in cars – the motivation to achieve is everything. It is a critical part of settlement. It embodies the need of the migrant to become socially integrated. This motivation will activate the discovery or use of already well-known strategies that will facilitate language learning. It is surprising that both the teachers' and the learners' absorption in the demands of the task, the urge to problem solve and the need to question would often take the use of English structures and functions for granted. Everyone in the first language groups was involved in a common task and shared understanding. The learners began to use the Driver Rules terminology and explanation functions. They were able to respond at their language level and be understood by others in the group, as well as by the teacher, because there was a sharing of a common content language, if not an obsession with it.

The learning was centred on speaking and listening, and reading. It was the learners' own decision to write down notes, or copy sentences or key words from the whiteboard. There was no requirement to do so. The lower level reading and writing students copied information into their books from the whiteboard more frequently than those at a higher level. The two special focus students who were at CSWE II level also used more structured learning strategies than higher level fast-paced CSWE learners. For example, they asked for important text to be highlighted in the textbook. They also recorded key vocabulary in their workbook and joined in with a small study group at break times.

The result of these lessons in terms of the Driver's Licence test was that all passed the Give Way test. However, two learners with a Madi language background, for whom no interpreter could be found, did not pass the Theory test initially.

The course is now offered each term, with a constant demand of 40 students. The demand hasn't gone away, and the students are on the road.

Annotated bibliography

The CBI (content-based instruction) model of instruction is not well documented at the adult level, even though all teachers of adult learners are aware of its use. Therefore, this fact sheet, along with that compiled by Alan Williams (see below), provides among the clearest discussion of the implementation of a CBI approach with learners such as those in the AMEP. Additionally, two chapters in Murray and McPherson also address content and technology, especially in the AMEP.

Brinton, D., Snow, M., & Wesche, M. (1989). *Content-based second language instruction*. New York: Newbury House. Re-released through the University of Michigan Press, 2003.

This volume presents a discussion of different models of content-based instruction – adjunct language instruction, theme-based language instruction and sheltered content instruction – providing examples of each. They provide a rationale for content-based instruction and practical advice on how to implement such programs and write or adapt materials for content-based teaching.

Brinton, D. M., & Master, P. (Eds.). (1997). *New ways of content-based instruction*. Alexandria, VA: TESOL.

This volume offers CBI activities from a number of different settings using a variety of models. It includes theme-based courses, sheltered content-area courses, and adjunct arrangements at the university level, as well as activities for CBI with younger learners in elementary, middle or high schools.

Davies, S. (2003). Content-based instruction in EFL settings. *The Internet TESOL Journal*, 9(2). Available online: http://iteslj.org/Articles/Davies-CBI.html

Although designed for those teaching in EFL settings, this is a very readable, easily accessed introduction to the basic model types of CBI.

Mohan, B. (1987). *Language and content*. Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley.

This classic volume presents Mohan's particular knowledge framework for content-based instruction. This framework includes the six types of knowledge (and language use) he considers to be common in the way many cultures structure knowledge and activity. One of his examples involves an activity on car insurance for adult learners.

Murray, D. E., & McPherson, P. (2004). *Using the Web to support language learning*. Sydney: NCELTR.

While this volume focuses on all areas of using the Web in language instruction, two chapters focus on the use of the content available on the Web for language teaching. One overviews CBI and how to use the Web as a source of information; another focuses on Webquests, a particular instructional design that incorporates information and communication resources available on the Internet.

Snow, M. A. (1998). Trends and issues in content-based instruction. *Annual Review of Applied Linguistics*, 18, 243–67.

In this chapter, Snow suggests a continuum of CBI, with content-driven models (such as adjunct) at one end, and language-driven ones (such as courses using content for language practice) at the other. She also presents a cogent discussion of where CBI fits conceptually – as a method with many faces (her own view) or as a syllabus type. While most of the focus is on K–12 and university CBI, there is a summary of research and a discussion of three challenges: the role of language teaching; upgrading skills of content-area teachers; and what constitutes content. What is not discussed is the upskilling of language teachers in a specific content area, such as road rules or citizenship.

Snow, M. A., & Brinton, D. M. (Eds.). (1997). *The content-based classroom: Perspective on integrating language and content*. White Plains, NY: Longman.

This volume is an updated and expanded version of the 1992 *The CATESOL Journal* special issue. It is a comprehensive discussion of CBI across all levels and includes theoretical foundations; syllabus, materials and course design; teacher preparation; research; assessment; and alternative models.

Sticht, T. G. (1997). *The theory behind content-based instruction. Focus on Basics, 1*(D). Available online: http://gseweb.harvard.edu/~ncsall/fob/1997/sticht.htm

This article summarises research in cognitive science that supports learning through content. The particular focus is on teaching literacy to adults in the US, but many of the findings and ideas are relevant to second language learners in the AMEP.

The CATESOL Journal, 5(1), guest edited by M. A. Snow and D. M. Brinton.

This special issue includes an article by David Eskey on syllabus design in CBI, with many shorter articles of interest to AMEP teachers, such as the relationship between ESP and CBI; the relationship between workplace literacy and CBI; the relationship between CBI and vocational ESL (VESL); and challenges for CBI instructors.

Williams, A. (2004). *Fact sheet – Enhancing language teaching with content*. Sydney: AMEP Research Centre.

This fact sheet provides an overview of various approaches to CBI, including those of Mohan, and includes early work on topic syllabus design in Australia for new arrivals. It also provides extensive practical guidelines for AMEP teachers on how to apply CBI in their particular classrooms.

Internet resources

The British Council/BBC Teaching English website: http://www.teachingenglish.org.uk/think/methodology/content.shtml

This site briefly explains what CBI is, describes what a CBI lesson looks like, and discusses the advantages and potential problems in implementing CBI.

Center for Applied Linguistics website: http://www.cal.org/resources/faqs/rgos/content.html

This is an online guide with links to resources such as publications, websites, teaching resources, and email discussion groups that offer information about teaching language through content-based instruction in K–12 and adult ESL programs, and in foreign language programs. Some of the links provide lesson plans and other instructional materials that can be adapted for use with AMEP clients.

Ohio University ESL website: http://www.ohiou.edu/esl/teacher/content.html

This site provides links to CBI resources around the world, including the use of Webquests and other online ways of integrating content and language in instruction.

University of Wisconsin's Center for Advanced Research in Language Acquisition website: http://www.carla.umn.edu/cobaltt/

This site focuses on content-based language teaching and technology, but has articles that provide overviews of CBI, including issues and its several dimensions.